

Haunted Past

By: Riverche

The Shuttle Maintenance Bay:

Shuttles of various sizes and in various states of repair lined the sides of the large room. Workers sat on top of some showering the area with sparks. Others tightened or loosened bolts. Outer shells lay on the ground next to exposed wires and circuits. Droids zoomed between the hunks of metal. A miraluka on a ramp of a shuttle position in the middle of the bay finishes placing scattered tools in a black case.

"Claire, are we ready?"

"Finished the inventory, we can take off as soon as we clean up the mess." A soft voice assured the female from the shuttle.

A young man ran into the bay headed straight for the blind female. "Riverche, I... I'm glad you ... You haven't left yet!" stuttered the out-of-breath young human.

"Ugg, what's so urgent?" River closed and pushed the case into her staff leaning near the entrance of the shuttle.

"One moment." He held up a finger and grabbed the ramp's hydraulic support with his other hand.

Claire poked her head out of the shuttle. "We have clearance to leave. We need to hurry before..."

"Before what, Claire?" Riverche called after the blonde retreating back into the shuttle's control center.

The young man interrupted before the young woman answered. "The Consul has a mission for you. Here are the instructions." He produced a flat tablet from his back belt pocket and offered it face down to the miraluka in front of him. "Since they couldn't reach you, they sent me to deliver the message."

"What!? I'm on vacation. I have another week before I'm due to return. You can't be serious!" River's voice echoed through the bay. Faces glanced up from the neighboring piles of space-worthy junk.

She grabbed her data pad from her side and turned it on. Many messages crowded the screen.

"Riverche, please stop by my office before going to work on Claire's shuttle." "River, I need to talk with you." "Answer your messages, this is important." "Where are you? We need to talk!" "Until we talk, I'm going to revoke your test run!" "You leave me no choice. I'm sending my aide to you."

"We are only supposed to take the shuttle out for a test run, nothing fancy. We're not prepared for any kind of mission." She continued.

Placing the tablet on the case, "Get prepared and good luck." The man left through the bay doors waving over his shoulder.

A deep breath in. A deep breath out. She picked up the abandoned interruption of her day and headed up the ramp. "We have a new plan." River focused on the new instructions and slumped into the seat next to the blonde. "Do we have enough supplies for a couple of days?"

“Yes, where to?” Claire started punching buttons surrounding her.

River scrolled through the tablet’s contents. “Vandor! Here are the coordinates they gave us.” River offered the tablet to her friend.

Claire took the tablet and punched a sequence of numbers into the ship’s computer. “It’s a day’s journey. We only have about a week’s worth of rations. That should be enough. Why are we going there? It’s a frozen wasteland.”

River got up, moved the case into a drawer on the side of the ship, grabbed her staff, and returned to her seat. “To acquire a holocron from an old Sith Temple.”

Vandor:

“Are you sure we are in the right place?” the blind copilot fidgeted in her seat. “We should have found something by now.” The view on the shuttle’s screen shifted from a tree-covered peak to a barren snow pile.

“This is the coordinates they gave us. We can turn back if you want?” The blonde commanded the shuttle to circle the new pile of snow.

“No, we came this far. We can’t quit without giving at least one more try. Circle the area...”

“Wait I see something!” The setting sun glistened off an arch peaking through the snow coming into the view of the shuttle. “It’s an ... I’ll land as close as I can.”

River spun her chair around, grabbed her staff, and stood to take a cloak from the shuttles side panel. “Stay with the shuttle. I shouldn’t be long. If I’m not back in a few hours...”

“Don’t worry. You’ll be back. You’re only retrieving a stupid cube. What can go wrong?”

“Sith temples are always dangerous. I have no idea what is in there. Judging by the size of the hill, it’s not that big. But, please, don’t come after me. I don’t think you can’t handle what is inside.” The ramp lowered onto the frozen ground not even stirring up a single frozen drop. The adventurer paused at the base of the ramp. Beyond the archway, pillars, about five meters apart, supported a half-moon roof over a path. Writings and vines covered the massive arch and each pillar. A carpet stained with years of dirt showed the way. “The cube isn’t stupid. It contains information that the Consul deems important. If I don’t return by morning, don’t come after me. Do you understand?” The crunching of River’s boots drowned out the young lady’s replay if she had one. “That should give me enough time.”

Another archway highlighted a set of grand double doors at the end of the path. River cleared away the vines on the doors with her staff and pushed. Nothing. No handles and no sign of any kind of locks visible, the doors should have opened. They were stuck. She leaned into them with all her might. They slid open with a loud bang that showered the grand room on the other side with dust.

Starting on each side of the doors, lights flickered on one at a time circling the white marble walls. Well-placed white ‘stars’ in the dark ceiling mimicked the constellation outside. An emerald green altar on the far side of the room shimmered in the light. Bones of fallen victims and torches made of onyx lined the

deep green path leading to the stone altar. A deep emerald holocron rested in a set of lighter emerald hands carved into the back wall. "It can't be this easy." Riverche followed the path to the altar turning over a body here and there with her staff's end. The floor under the body was white marble matching the walls. "What killed these people? Is this the holocron I'm looking for?"

Engraved writing littered the tops and sides of the altar. "What does this say?" The blind lady ran her fingers over the etched words. They felt familiar but not at the same time. An "a" here. A "c" there. But not a recognizable word. Nothing special about the altar.

The set of carved hands on the marble wall behind the table formed a 'v' shape with palms joined in the center. The fingers curled around the upside-down pyramid-shaped cube resting in the palms. River fingered the hands. Nothing. She traced the smooth fingers with her fingers. The emerald nails sparkled in the light as her fingers went over them. Nothing. She touched the treasured block. "Bang." Dust showered the room.

"Stand aside! You will not survive this night unless you can face my challenge. You will meet three spirits, The spirit of a loved one, the spirit of regret, and the spirit of an enemy. If you can survive them all, then you will be free to leave with the holocron you seek. Yet, if you fail then you die here. Let us begin!" Echoed through the room.

Spirit of a Loved One:

The miraluka turned towards the center of the room. A spotlight embraced a black hooded man hand outstretched. "Come here, my child. I will not hurt you. Take my hand."

"Father! You can't be. He ... you died years ago." River approached the cloaked man.

"I'm only a spirit. I took the form of someone from your past. Come, time is short and I've got a lot to show you." River placed her hand in his. "Remember the day your dad brought home the loth cat?"

"Yes, Pots. He was so loyal and playful before..."

A young miraluka in a gray tunic and a matching eye covering teased a gray and black spotted kitten with a string. "Daddy. He likes me. Can I keep him?"

An older gentleman slumped into a nearby chair and kicked off his boots into a set of walking sticks. He then removed and threw his worn-out socks into a basket in the corner. "Yes, sweetie. What will we call him?"

The young cat jumped after the string knocking over a pot of soup. "Pots!" The girl ran to get ...

A lady grabbed the now-grown Pots by the neck. "No cats. I will not take in any cats!" Pots flew through the air towards an open window.

"No! Pots!" An older girl in black dropped a stick and leaped for the window in time to catch the helpless animal.

"Leave it. Come!" The lady grabbed River on her arm. "That mangy cat is history. Come, time to go!" Having no choice, River grabbed her stick and dropped the cat as the lady dragged the crying girl out the door. "Weak! Pathetic!"

The streets lined with mud homes blurred as the vehicle wound through the town. The doors of the hoover car opened to reveal a gate labeled "Home of the weak." The young girl lingered at the side of the vehicle for a moment. A bag flew at her feet.

"Well, pick it up. We don't have all day." The new arrival grabbed the bag and followed the lady through the gates. Up a set of stairs to massive wooden doors. The massive doors swung open to a pristine, empty hall with stairs on either side. Doors on the far wall blocked the view of the dining room and kitchen. Three doors on each side wall leading to the classrooms and the work rooms.

"Welcome home! Unless you get a new family," the lady looked the girl up and down, "unlikely, you are not to use these doors for any reason. Boys are to the left; you are not allowed to go there. Girls are to the right." The lady pointed at the stairs before motioning straight ahead. "That is the dining area and kitchen. Through the kitchen is the yard. No food is to come through those doors for any reason. You will keep your space tidy. You will make your bed and get dressed before coming down for breakfast. I assume you can do that."

"Yes. I can."

"Good. If you are late, you don't eat. After breakfast, study time till lunch. Work ... We will find something for you to do. Blind rat. Dinner then showers and bed. Got it, good."

River removed her hand from the ghost, "Why are you showing me this?"

"This is the day your life changed. There is more." The ghost pointed past her towards a changed scene.

The girl approached a row of bunk beds. Children bounced around shouting and calling her names.

"Loser." "Baby." "Weakling." "Ugly."

A lonely bald kid sat on a corner bed. The young miraluka pushed her way through the gaggle of girls and stood by the bed. "Hello, I'm River."

"I'm Vayla. Why do you wear...?" Vayla pointed to her eyes.

"I'm a miraluka. I was born with no eyes. The covering protects my eye sockets. Why are you in the corner?" River leaned on the bed.

"Oh, so you have no eyes. Can you see?"

"In a way, yes. The image of the area appears in my mind as long as I'm not too emotional. My dad was teaching me to control it before ..." Tears started to form in the young girl's eyes. She climbed on the edge of the bed she was leaning on.

"Interesting. I like the corner, it's safe here. What's a miraluka?" Vayla straightened up flattening her legs into a circle.

"Some people are human and some aren't. Miraluka is like ..." River rested her stick on the edge of the bed by the wall.

“Oh, like Sasha over there is a Twilek.” Vayla interrupted. “And I’m a Clawdite.”

“Enough!” River stepped away from the ghost. “This day changed my life. It was the day of my dad’s funeral and the day I ended up in that orphanage. It started out depressing, hopeless, and sad, but that is also the same day that I met my best friend. We grew up together from that day on. She became like a sister to me and is the only family I have. We even work together to this day. And as for Pots, he showed up a week later with cuts and bruises. Even missing his tail. Vayla was the main person that helped me to hide and take care of him for the last remaining years of his life. The other girls never stopped making fun of me and Vayla, but even they snuck food in for Pots. I wouldn’t”

Spirit of Regret:

The ghost faded into a mist. The vision crumpled leaving River standing in the middle of a pile of bones. River turned a full circle. No one was there. Another circle. No one. A gray mist meandered around the room from behind the altar. Around the sides of the room. Up the center path. “I’m the spirit of regret. I must show you the thing you regret the most.” A gray-cloaked figure appeared beside River pointing a bony finger past her. “Look!”

A busy marketplace filled in the empty room. Stalls selling spices, rugs, and trinkets. A stable filled with exotic animals occupied the corner. A café filled the air with the sweet smell of cinnamon. People bumped into each other. A street urchin grabbed a piece of fruit from one of the tables. The shopkeeper ran after the young kid as other kids picked his table clean and ran away.

A man dressed in dark clothes removed a cylinder from his belt. A red beam of light hissed to life. He swung knocking over a stall. He kept swinging till blood and screams filled the air. Burnt flesh replaced the smell of cinnamon. Animals silenced. Rugs and trinkets are worthless. Buildings and stalls burnt. Flames engulfed the nearby homes. At the first sign of intruders, the man admired his handy work and disappeared.

“You created this!” accused the ghost.

“I didn’t know he would do that! When I took him on ...” River protested.

“You are responsible for all this! You trained him! You are unworthy to ...”

“No! I had no idea what he would do. Yes, I regret training him. I regret that I was late that day. I regret I even got involved with him. But that is also the day I found Claire. She was the one who stole the apple. She was the one who ran and hid. She is now my personal pilot. I may have ...”

The Gray Ghost vanished in a puff of smoke. Riverche looked to the left. No one. To the right. No one. Behind her a hiss of a saber coming to life. Without hesitation, the Miraluka swung her staff.

Spirit of an Enemy:

The red-cloaked ghost jumped back. "I will kill you. You are worthless. Weak. Blind." The ghost bated at the victim in a downward angle burning the edge of her cloak. River's staff sliced the air in a parallel arc to the floor missing the ghost blocking its saber on the upswing.

"I'm not worthless or weak!" River blocked the phantom's attempt at another swing. The Miraluka's electrified staff bounced off the other blade slicing the left hand of the ghost. Mist circled the hand to rebuild.

"You are weak! You couldn't save those people! You" The ghost raised its saber to strike.

"Enough! I'm not weak! I'm not worthless! I may be blind but I can still see!" River blocked an incoming blow. "I may have sadness and regrets but those days are also my happiest ..."

Red smoke slithered back towards the altar. "Boom!" The doors swung open. River walked to the hands to retrieve the reward. The cube in the open hands dissolved into sand. Claire ran into the room. "Did you get what you came for?"

River spun around to see her friend standing by the doors. "I thought I told you to stay at the shuttle. And no, I didn't get the Holocron. It turned into sand. I'll tell you about it on the way home."

River walked to meet Claire at the doors. "You did tell me to stay at the shuttle, but it's morning and I was ..."

"Wait, how long was I in here?" They began walking down the pillared walkway side by side.

"All night. Hours. This place is weird!" They walked up the ramp. Claire sat down at the controls getting ready to leave.

"What happened?" A green cube fell out of River's cloak as she hung it up. River bent picked it up. "Weird." She muttered under her breath.

"I already sent the consul a message about the ... Wait I thought ..." Claire turned to face the Miraluka.

"So, did I. We have a lot to talk about. Don't send them any more messages until we get home." River slid into the chair next to the blonde.